AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1.-16. Canceled.

17. (Currently Amended) A nitride semiconductor laser comprising:

a GaN substrate having a sapphire substrate and a single-crystal GaN layer formed on said sapphire substrate, said single-crystal GaN layer formed through a lateral-growth process and defining the upper surface of said GaN substrate;

a small-crack-preventing layer made of $Al_aGa_{1-a}N(0<a<0.1)$ ~~and contacting~~formed directly on the upper surface of said GaN substrate, said small-crack-preventing layer having a coefficient of thermal expansion less than that of GaN thereby providing compression strain on said small-crack-preventing layer;

an n-type cladding layer containing Al;

an active layer containing InGaN; and

a p-type cladding layer containing Al.

18. (Previously Presented) The nitride semiconductor laser according to claim 17, wherein said n-type cladding layer contains more Al than said small-crack-preventing layer.

19. (Previously Presented) The nitride semiconductor laser according to claim 17, wherein said small-crack-preventing layer has a thickness of not less than $1\mu m$.

20. (Previously Presented) The nitride semiconductor laser according to claim 17, wherein said small-crack-preventing layer has a thickness of 3 to 10μm.

21. (Previously Presented) The nitride semiconductor laser according to claim 17, wherein said small-crack-preventing layer has been grown without an impurity doping.

22. (Previously Presented) The nitride semiconductor laser according to claim 17, wherein an indium gallium nitride layer is intervened between said small-crack-preventing layer and said n-type cladding layer.

23. (New) A nitride semiconductor laser comprising:

a substrate made of material different from nitride semiconductor;

a dislocation-reducing layer formed on said substrate by a lateral-growth process, the surface of said dislocation-reducing layer being made of single-crystal GaN;

a small-crack-preventing layer made of $Al_aGa_{1-a}N(0<a<0.1)$ and formed directly on said dislocation-reducing layer, said small-crack-preventing layer having a coefficient of thermal expansion less than that of GaN thereby providing compression strain on said small-crack-preventing layer;

an n-type cladding layer containing Al;

an active layer containing InGaN; and

a p-type cladding layer containing Al.

24. (New) The nitride semiconductor laser according to claim 23, wherein said substrate is made of sapphire.